THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

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by a great many scholars in past years, but it would now be widely agreed that their Christology did enshrine a very real soteriological concern.[1] Their soteriology was not the same as that of their Alexandrian opponents, but it was just as real. While the evidence is insufficient for definite judgement, it is at least not unreasonable to suggest that the same may have been true of Arius in relation to his Alexandrian opponent.

All this is not to say that after all Arius was right, nor is it to accuse Athanasius of illogicality or unspirituality. Counsel for the defence does not need to smear the character of the chief witness for the prosecution. It is to suggest that the difference between the two sides is not as absolute or as clear-cut as has traditionally been assumed. Arius was seriously inhibited by the rigidity of the philosophical framework within which he was operating. As a result his teaching is certainly an inadequate account of the fullness of Christian truth. But that is true in some degree of every Christian theologian, ancient and modern. Even if it is true of Arius in a comparatively high degree, it would not seem to be in such a high degree as to merit the description 'utterly illogical and unspiritual'. MAURICE WILES

THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

BY the second century B.C. anthropology emerges as a distinguishable product of Graeco-Roman culture. It makes its appearance in the form of debates about the nature of the soul, and of the relationship of the soul with the body. As far back as the fifth century B.C. Hippocrates had written a work *On the Nature of Man*, and in so doing initiated two movements. One of these produced philosophic anthropology, and the other brought into being medical science. It was the progress of the latter that was so profoundly to affect the lines of development of the former. For Aristotelian teleology encouraged medicine to make its aim the assistance of nature to restore health. This promoted a study of the functions of the members of the healthy living body. Then Greek medicine began a new development in Alexandria under the Ptolemies, influenced perhaps by the age-old practices of the Egyptians in the embalming of their dead. Alexandrine medicine now invoked the aid of anatomy, to link function to structure. And if teleology still dominated medical studies, at least it stimulated close observation of the relations between function and structure. As a result knowledge of the working of the human body continued to advance, until, in the second Christian century, the genius of Galen gathered up almost the whole of Greek

[1] See especially R. V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*, pp. 116–17.

medicine into one system which dominated medical practice for many centuries.

The new knowledge stimulated appreciation of the human body as a living organism, and turned anthropological speculation aside from aiming at a Platonic σῶμα–σῆμα conclusion, to pursue optimistic ideas of man as the destined king of the phenomenal universe. This change was contemporaneous with a general striving to reconcile the three great Greek systems of philosophy, in which Posidonius of Apamea appears to have been an outstanding champion. And all through this period knowledge and understanding of human anatomy and physiology went on growing. So, when Christianity began to penetrate Graeco-Roman society, Gentile anthropologists were busily employed there in trying to establish the lines of the good and truly human life.

Converts to Christianity, on the other hand, were initiated into another and scriptural doctrine of man's nature, which claimed the prerogatives of revelation and formed the basis for inculcation of the Christian way of life. Educated converts who had formerly engaged in the philosophic pursuit of virtue seem to have recognized that the Christian way of life differed greatly from at least the actual ethics of Gentile society. They tended, therefore, to put biblical anthropology into the place of any anthropological and ethical ideas which they may have had before conversion. Always such converts had to make terms between their new faith and their previous world of thought. But it was natural for debate to begin with theological issues. The identification of Christ with the divine Logos had the first claim upon Christian apologetic, and a good deal of time was to elapse before Christian thinkers felt pressed to make terms between the two anthropologies. So it happened that for a while, when Gentile anthropology was making rapid and fruitful progress, Christian thought was not thereby affected in the least.

Presently ascetic leanings manifested themselves among Christian converts, and some of those affected began to quarrel with Old Testament teaching on man's nature, life, and history. Such people broke away from the congregations of apostolic tradition, formulated a dualistic cosmology as part of their Gnosis, or pretended private revelation, and established themselves in heretical sects. Their dualism ranged them at the other extreme from the Stoic monism which now dominated Gentile anthropology. So Tertullian saw his opportunity to make the Gnostic leaders look foolish by enlisting support from such writers as the physician Soranus.[1] Thus he appeals, in his work *On the*

[1] So J. H. Waszink, *Tertullian's De Anima* (1947).

Soul, to the observations of embryologists, in refutation of the view common among Gnostics, that souls enter bodies at birth. But in pursuing such polemical ends, Tertullian invoked the physicians no farther than suited his purpose. And, while he calls medical science 'philosophy's sister', he will not allow that Christian faith needs support from either physicians or philosophers, whose part is, at the most, to check one another. Christian anthropology, as going beyond pure scriptural teaching, can hardly therefore be said to have come into being through Tertullian.

It did begin, however, when Origen conceived of partnership between revelation and reason, a partnership in which he saw that the supremacy must always lie with revelation. And this partnership would reach to anthropology. Meanwhile Gentile anthropology was standing ready with a wealth of reasoned thought about the nature of man which was not in conflict with the scriptural doctrine of man, and could therefore be joined to it and extend the scope of Christian anthropology. Origen proceeded to act upon his convictions in this respect. His Commentary on Genesis only survives in fragments. But enough is known to prove that he drew heavily upon the anthropological ideas of Posidonius. It is therefore with Origen that Christian thought began to make terms with Gentile philosophy on the subject of the nature of man.

Some of Origen's disciples undoubtedly continued the task. Their works have not survived, and the reason no doubt is that they failed to purge their anthropology of traces of Origen's prime error, his doctrine that a premundane fall of human souls was the cause of the creation of this universe. Yet one who may be numbered among Origen's ultimate disciples, Gregory of Nyssa, wrote a work *On the Making of Man*[1] which has survived. It survives because it expressly dissociates itself from Origen's error, and comes down firmly on the side of traducianism. So distinguished a student of Nyssen as the late Dr. W. Jaeger goes further, and declares[2] that 'Gregory of Nyssa became the true founder of Christian philosophic anthropology when he wrote his great work *De Opificio Hominis*'. It may be conceded that the name of Gregory Nyssen has been widely associated in the minds of ecclesiastical writers with philosophic Christian anthropology. But it does not appear that this particular work has had much influence in promoting Christian anthropological thought. Dräseke, it is true, has shown how it influenced John Scotus Erigena.[3] But such an influence is explained by those very

[1] Edition in G. H. Forbes's Burntisland volume of works of Nyssen (1855–61). English version by H. A. Wilson in vol. v, *Nicene and Post-nicene Fathers* (1893).

[2] In *Two Rediscovered Works* (Leiden, 1954).

[3] *Theologische Studien u. Kritiken*, lxxxii (Gotha, 1909), pp. 530–76.

leanings in Erigena which brought him under suspicion of heresy. There is another work of Christian anthropology that passed frequently in manuscript tradition under Nyssen's name (though its author was in fact Nemesius, bishop of Emesa) and this can be shown to have exerted a widespread influence on Christian anthropological thinking.[1] But before we turn to it, we should try to characterize Nyssen's work *On the Making of Man*. Written *currente calamo* to be ready as an Easter gift to Peter of Sebaste in 380, it aims to make good what is lacking from Basil's *Hexaemeron*, namely a commentary on the creation of man. It has a markedly ecclesiastical tone. Nyssen argues that nothing about man is so important as the fact and manner of his being created in the image of God. True to Origenist tradition, he makes use of Gentile anthropology, but as a source of matter with which to enhance orthodox doctrine or embellish his argument in its support. And this argument drives him to lay such stress upon mind, as that in which man is most evidently in the image of God, that he concludes section 14 with the words *ἡ μὲν ἀληθής τε καὶ τελεία ψυχὴ μία τῇ φύσει ἐστίν, ἡ νοερά τε καὶ ἄϋλος*. The rest of human psychology, it seems to be implied, has not the same relevance to orthodox religion. Nyssen had had to yield to medical demonstration that the mind is to some extent swayed by the body. This he saw to be something which it was not safe for Christians to ignore. But he did not want the people of the Church to go picking up their information from those outside the Church. So he retails, in a final chapter, outlines of the physiology of the heart, liver, and brain. This is introduced with the words *εἰ δέ τις ἐπιζητοίη πάντων αὐτῶν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν διδάσκαλον γίνεσθαι, ὡς εἰς μηδὲν τῆς ἔξωθεν φωνῆς ἐπιδεῖσθαι* .... So it is implied that such extra-canonical anthropology had best be dispensed to the people of the Church by learned ecclesiastics. If a physician's knowledge of the body has a bearing on morality and the care of the soul, it falls within the scope of Christian pastorate. And if this was how Nyssen viewed these things, he was far from seeking to develop, in any liberal sense, a Christian philosophic anthropology. His reputation for having such an interest came, in no small measure, from his being credited with the work *On the Nature of Man* actually written by his contemporary Nemesius of Emesa. When this is set beside Nyssen's book, its very different characteristics are thrown into relief. It has nothing of Nyssen's rhetorical cleverness, and it certainly was not written quickly. Those few passages that reveal anything of the doctrinal orthodoxy of Nemesius are entirely in his favour. But the tone of

[1] Edition by C. F. Matthaei, Halle, 1802. English version by W. Telfer, *Library of Christian Classics* (1955), vol. iv, pp. 201–455. For the influence of this work, Telfer, op. cit., pp. 216–23.

the work is markedly unecclesiastical. Otherwise the outstanding personal revelation of the author which the book effects is of his having received a very good medical education. But he never appeals to his own clinical experience or gives any indication of having been in professional practice. We must conclude that he studied medicine as a department of philosophy specially suited to the education of a gentleman and as a preparation for being the master of a household. It is clear that he did not leave these interests behind him, but that they were lifelong. Galen was his most-read author. He cites Galen from memory, and betrays knowledge of fifteen of his treatises. At one point,[1] where he apparently wished to make an exact quotation, he left a space for it which was never filled. Presumably the treatise from which the citation should come was available, and what was not available was only the leisure to hunt through the volume for the passage wanted. Nemesius expresses great admiration for Galen. Yet he knew other medical opinions beside Galen's, and in one instance at least sides against Galen.[2]

A second source of ideas that go to the making of this book was the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, studied through commentaries. The ethical interests of Nemesius certainly did not begin with his conversion to Christianity. They must indeed have been fostered for a long while before that took place, so that we must account him a late-in-life convert.

A third ingredient of the book is a doxography on the nature of the soul, followed by a review of Neo-Platonic opinions with regard to the manner of the union between soul and body. And if we subtract all specifically Christian passages, which in bulk form but a small part of the book, what remains lacks nothing of what would be needed for a Gentile work on the nature of man. Moreover, the book in the form that has come down to us extends beyond the indication of its title; which suggests that the title was chosen for an earlier draft, which was itself pure Gentile anthropology. The text that has come down to us is, no doubt rightly, attributed to the Syrian bishop of Emesa, Nemesius. But it is clearly an unrevised and unfinished work. Presumably the author was still working on it when he died. And the task that was thus interrupted was the rehandling of an anthropology written before conversion. The aim of the undertaking must be judged by reference to the particular circumstances of Nemesius. In the late fourth century Syrians outside the Church knew a good deal about Christian affairs. Christology had become a question of State, and public politics turned

[1] Telfer, op. cit., p. 272, n. 5.

[2] Op. cit., p. 331, sect. 30 (Comparative anatomy of the tongue), p. 366, sect. 42 (Blood in the arteries; 'Female semen').

upon its right formulation. Judaism was respected, and some knowledge of the contents of the Old Testament was common property among Syrian Gentiles. The allusions to Christianity and scripture in Nemesius' work as we have it lie within what could be suitably addressed to such people. This suggests that Nemesius when bishop used his pre-conversion Anthropology entitled *On the Nature of Man* as the basis of an Apology addressed to his unconverted fellow-countrymen, and not to the baptized. The readers for whom it was thus destined would find in it much that was congenial. Nemesius had sufficient sympathy with the culture in which most of his life had been spent to know that. And he knew how to interest them with hints of a deeper wisdom possessed by those within the Church, in the hope of drawing them after him in his spiritual pilgrimage. He did not stand aloof from his pre-conversion book, but went on writing it. It is his life's work, extended now to plead for faith in divine providence against the fatalism that was so prevalent in Syria.[1] And in as far as it remains an Anthropology, it is authentically Christian, while at the same time compacted from lifelong digestion of Greek science and philosophy in their anthropological bearing.

Two passages may serve to illustrate the manner of the rehandling and the character of the work before rehandling.

The doxography, so far as it deals with the opinions of the ancients, came no doubt from common stock. To bring it up to date Nemesius added the opinions of Eunomius, Apollinarius, the Manichees, the Neo-Platonists, and Galen. He says nothing of the first two being either Christians or heretics. In using the Old Testament to refute their opinions he once commits a blunder. This part of the book might have been written while Nemesius was still outside the Church though interesting himself in it. In reviewing the Neo-Platonists he commends Iamblichus in terms which are surprising as coming from the pen of a Christian.[2] And we may conjecture, therefore, that this part of the book received no revision, but only the addition of an epilogue to say that the Christian scriptures contain the last word on the immortality of the soul.

The second passage is one that is apt to strike the modern reader as awkward to the point of being grotesque. It occurs towards the end of the first chapter,[3] where a panegyric on man, of Posidonian inspiration, is reaching its climax in the theme of 'Man, the maker of the City'.

[1] Socrates (ii. 9. 8) and Sozomen (iii. 6. 5) quote a panegyric on Eusebius bishop of Emesa, saying that the Emesenes took fright at him because of a rumour that he practised astrology.

[2] Telfer, op. cit., p. 289, sect. 17.

[3] Op. cit., p. 244, sect. 7.

We come suddenly upon an obviously Christian insertion: 'Man has two choice prerogatives . . . man only, on repenting, can gain forgiveness. And only man's body, though mortal, is immortalized.' After a sentence or two Nemesius goes on, 'Now, just as laughter is a peculiar mark of man's being . . . so, in like manner, it is peculiar to man' (to enjoy the above two prerogatives). This in our eyes is illustrating the sublime from the ridiculous. But it is questionable whether it would have struck Nemesius' first readers in that way. Lucian had coined the adage *ἄνθρωπος γελαστικόν*.[1] This might be called 'low-brow' anthropology, but none the less popular for that reason. A Sextus Empiricus might make the tart comment *ἄμετρος γέλως σημεῖον ἀπροσεξίας*,[2] and a Chrysostom might say, with greater gentleness, *οὐ κακὸν ὁ γέλως . . . ἔγκειται ἐν ἡμῖν*,[3] but follow his words up with a casuistry of fitting and unfitting laughter. Lucian's saying was so effective, however, for exactly the reason expressed here by Nemesius, 'because laughter pertains to man only, to every single man, and to all men at all times'. The Posidonian prerogatives of man, to which he passes next, namely, of practising arts and knowing sciences, are 'high-brow' and have no such universality of appeal. The Lucianic adage, as Nemesius expands it, whether it belonged to the original draft or came in with the revision, is calculated to make the reader apply to himself what is being said. There can be no question of the earnest desire of Nemesius the bishop to bring home to his every reader the fact that there was hope for him of forgiveness and immortality. Beyond that, however, Nemesius reveals nothing of the Christian dogmas on these subjects. Man, he says, is by nature forgivable, but he adds no word about the cross as the means by which he attains forgiveness. Equally, nothing is disclosed of the manner in which man's body is immortalized, though a reader looking for a hint might find one. There is a reference, in chapter 38, to the translation of Enoch and Elias as singular proofs of God's almighty power.[4] And it might lead a thoughtful reader to the conclusion that God has a paradisiacal body prepared for each of His elect, an immortal body related in some essential way to that mortal body to which He bound them *ἐν σχέσει*, so long as He preserved that body in life. For this doctrine of a *σχέσις*, *ῥοπή*, or *διάθεσις* of the incorporeal soul towards its God-given 'body of corruption'[5] points to the conclusion that at the body's dissolu-

[1] *Vitarum auctio*, 26.
[2] Sentence 280a, in *Sentences of Sextus*, ed. H. Chadwick (1959), p. 44.
[3] Suicer, s.v. *γέλως*.
[4] Telfer, op. cit., p. 408, sect. 55.
[5] Matthaei, p. 135, line 11 = Telfer, op. cit., p. 299, sect. 21. Nemesius is here very close to Porphyry; see L. Scipioni, *Ricerche sulla Cristologia di Nestorio*, pp. 15–24.

tion the σχέσις of the soul would be instantly transferred on to the waiting or predestined immortal body. For the argument of Nemesius seems to exclude the possibility of a disembodied soul. But only the very attentive would get so far, and then they would have to become inquirers before they could learn the Christian revelation of a resurrection body.

We may conclude, then, that Nemesius wrote for his Gentile contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. Into this task, however, he put all that he had to give, from a life's pilgrimage which earned him in the end an honourable place among theologians of the School of Antioch. It is no wonder, therefore, if, down the ages, other minds have kindled from his mind, in an effort to develop a sound and Christian philosophic anthropology. So the words which Dr. Jaeger used of Gregory of Nyssa, in connexion with his tract *On the Making of Man*, might with greater justice be applied to Nemesius of Emesa and his work *On the Nature of Man*. There is no sign of the latter having been in any way inspired by the former. For, what they share, they share independently, by taking material, part humanist and part Christian, from what lay ready to anyone's hand at that time in their common background.

W. TELFER